United Nations

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- British hostage Terry Waite and American hostage Thomas Sutherland are released in Lebanon; Secretary-General expresses appreciation for assistance provided by all involved in hostage negotiations and calls for release of all detainees without due process of law.

- Secretary-General to travel to Europe, tomorrow, for official visits to Italy, Spain and France.

- Commissioner-General for United Nations Agency for Palestine Refugees in Near East says that only a solution of Palestine problem can usher era of peace in Middle East.

- Political and Security Committee concludes action on 37 drafts on disarmament issues.

- Legal Committee approves draft declaration on fact-finding by United Nations in maintenance of international peace and security.

- Meeting to approve projects aimed at controlling use of ozone-depleting substances in developing countries begins in Montreal.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar was informed today at noon by his Delegate, Giandomenico Picco, that two hostages -- British Terry Waite and American Thomas Sutherland -- had been released in Lebanon and were on their way to Damascus.

In a statement through his spokeswoman, the Secretary-General expressed particular appreciation for the cooperation he had received from the groups in Beirut through Mr. Picco. He said the particular difficult negotiations had been resolved because the groups had accepted a solution based on its merits rather than on any other consideration. He also thanked for the assistance provided by Iran and Syria.

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Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar said he was determined to pursue his efforts for the release of all those who were still detained without due process of law in the region, irrespective of their nationalities and religion. He expressed hope that not only the Westerners but also the Lebanese detainees would soon be reunited with their families.

The groups in Beirut, he said, had indeed taken the right decisions to go ahead with the release of the hostages. "This is the right decision, humanly, morally and politically", Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar said.

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The Secretary-General will leave New York for Europe tomorrow, for official visits to Italy, Spain and France at the invitation of the respective Governments.

His Spokeswoman told correspondents today that Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar would arrive in Rome on Friday, 22 November, for talks with Italian President Francesco Cossiga and Foreign Minister Gianni de Michelis.

On Saturday, 23 November, the Secretary-General would be received in private audience by Pope Jean Paul II. He would then fly to Madrid where on Monday, 25 November, King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia of Spain would bestow upon the Secretary-General the "Grand Cruz de Isabel la Catolica", Spain's highest honour. During his stay in Spain, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar was also expected to meet with Felipe Gonzalez, President of the Spanish Government.

On Wednesday, the Secretary-General would travel to Paris where on Thursday, 28 November, he would be guest at a luncheon offered in his honour by President of France François Mitterand. He is scheduled to return to New York over the weekend of 30 November.

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If the Middle East peace process failed, the world would be faced with an "unpredictable combination of frustration, resentment and despair", the Head of UNRWA told the General Assembly's Special Political Committee on Friday. The Commissioner-General of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ilter Turkmen, made that statement as the Committee began its consideration of the Agency's annual report. He added that only a solution to the Palestine problem could usher an era of just and final peace into the Middle East.

The Palestinian population in the Middle East had increased to some 5.5 million, with registered refugees numbering about 2.5 million. With the Palestine question now at a turning point, Mr. Turkmen said, the long-term fate of UNRWA was no longer in doubt. The Agency would be dissolved and would transfer its facilities, structures and services to the emerging Palestinians.

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The General Assembly's First Committee (Political and Security) has approved a number of drafts on disarmament, thus concluding action on all draft texts dealing with that issue. Over a one-week period, the Committee approved a total of 37 texts concerning such issues as regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, a nuclear arms freeze, a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, preventing an arms race in outer space, and a convention banning chemical weapons, among others.

Among the texts approved on Friday, one would have the Assembly ask the Secretary-General to establish and maintain a universal and non-discriminatory register of conventional arms. Such a register would "include data on international arms transfers as well as information provided by Member States on military holdings, procurement through national production.

In a concluding statement, Robert Mroziewicz (Poland), Chairman of the Committee, said there was a growing recognition that security issues could no longer be considered separately from environmental, political, social and other concerns. Disarmament issues were multidimensional in nature and the debate on them in the Committee had reflected that. With the dramatic announcements of cuts in nuclear arsenals by the nuclear Powers, he said, there was an added impetus to successfully conclude other disarmament initiatives such as a convention on chemical weapons.

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The General Assembly's Sixth Committee (Legal) has recommended the adoption of a draft Declaration on Fact-finding by the United Nations in the field of the Maintenance of International Peace and Security. The text was one of two approved without a vote on Friday, 15 November.

The text states that fact-finding should be comprehensive, impartial and timely and that the sending of a fact-finding mission to the territory of any State would require the prior consent of that State. It further declares that such missions could be undertaken by the Security Council, the Assembly or the Secretary-General.

Under the other draft declaration, the Assembly would take note of the report of the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization. It would also request the Secretary-General to publish and disseminate the Handbook on the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes between States in the official languages of the United Nations.

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A one-week meeting to seek to approve projects in developing countries aimed at controlling the use of ozone-depleting substances began today in Montreal.

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The meeting has been organized by the Executive Committee of the United Nations Interim Multilateral Fund, established to help eligible countries phase out controlled substances.

Ozone-depleting substances include chlorofluorocarbons and other ozone-destroying chemicals used primarily in refrigeration, air conditioning, sprays, foams and in fire extinguishers. Under the terms of the Montreal Protocol those substances must be phased out by the year 2000 with a 10-year grace period for developing countries.

Some $240 million is expected to be available for support of the activities of the Interim Multilateral Fund during 1991-1993.

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